



4-H Youth Development

2000 Programs of Excellence

Life Skills

Citizenship and Civic Education

4-H Legislative Ambassador Program

Illinois

Situation

Democracy needs the on-going involvement of active citizens, engaging youth in changing a piece of the public world, discovering the possibilities of democratic citizenship, and building a commitment to taking action in new and exciting ways to shape the nation's future. Citizenship and civic education have been a part of the 4-H program since its inception nearly 100 years ago. In addition to helping youth build life skills in citizenship and civic education, the 4-H Legislative Ambassador Program educates Illinois lawmakers about 4-H and the University of Illinois Extension. Although it is not a major objective of the program, it is important to recognize the value of orchestrated, year-around, one-on-one discussions between 4-H youth, leaders, alumni, and other supporters with local, state, and national lawmakers. Such discussions lead to a better understanding of 4-H program impacts, needs, goals, and objectives on the part of legislators, and youth learn how they can work within the legislative system to make differences in their communities.

Program Description

The Illinois 4-H Legislative Ambassador Program provides thousands of Illinois youth with an opportunity to connect with state government officials on a year-around basis to learn first-hand more about the legislative process. The 4-H Ambassador teams are organized by legislative, senatorial, and congressional districts. Adult volunteers help facilitate the teams' activities. The Ambassadors develop a plan to meet regularly with lawmakers to discuss issues of critical concern to youth and to serve as valued resources to state government officials. During the meetings, 4-H youth reported on the impact of 4-H in their legislative districts and the state.

Each year, the Ambassadors host 4-H Legislative Connection at the State Capitol. Last spring, more than 2,500 youth and their families traveled to Springfield to meet with lawmakers and present an annual report on the state of 4-H. More than 800 Superior Award winning 4-H exhibits from the Illinois State Fair lined the Capitol hallways. When the 4-H youth were not busy hosting the 4-H project exhibition, they were involved in educational tours, workshops, and one-on-one meetings with legislators. Highlights of the day's agenda were two mid-day rallies to salute 4-H in the Capitol Rotunda. These action-packed celebrations included a 4-H pep band, cheerleaders, pon pons, etc. Several 4-H youth were interviewed on stage along with 4-H volunteer leader representatives and 36 state legislators who are 4-H alumni. Bipartisan House and Senate leadership introduced the 4-H Ambassadors in the House of Representatives and Senate Chambers and presented them with framed proclamations citing the merits of Illinois 4-H. This one-day program serves as an excellent, highly visible, learning opportunity for 4-H youth.

Stakeholder Satisfaction

The 4-H Legislative Ambassador program has received high praise from lawmakers, educators, parents, and 4-H youth alike. Keys to the success of this effort included the involvement of youth in key leadership roles, the support of the University of Illinois Extension staff, and the help of 4-H volunteers, parents, and the media. Illinois 4-H enjoys strong legislative support for this effort. Unsolicited letters were received from 47 legislators expressing appreciation for the opportunity to meet one-on-one with 4-H constituents and learn more about 4-H and Extension. The University of Illinois Extension Partners reported that the success of this program is a key to continued support for Extension. Unsolicited letters of praise for the program were received from educators and school administrators throughout the state.

Accomplishments and Impacts

The success of 4-H Legislative Connection IV was evaluated via a paper/pencil survey instrument. Significant in the findings was that 89% of those in attendance rated this event excellent or very good. The six educational features were rated 92%, 88%, 85%, 82%, 78%, 74% excellent or very good. Less than 2% rated the event as being "poor." In addition, 84% of the participants responded that they "increased their knowledge of the legislative process." While the purpose of this effort was purely educational, it is a fact that Extension friendly legislation was passed by the Illinois legislature within weeks of 4-H Legislative Connections III and IV. Several parents wrote to praise the event. One parent reported that attending this event significantly changed the lives of her three children—that they were no longer involved with negative influences that resulted

in poor grades, low school attendance, and criminal activity. The parent attributed the dramatically improved grades, school attendance, high motivation, goal setting, and positive outlook to the inspiration that they received at 4-H Legislative Connection. There are currently 3,788 Illinois 4-H youth involved in the 4-H Legislative Ambassador Program with the numbers increasing monthly.

Resource Commitment

Illinois 4-H received a \$5,000 award from Attorney General Jim Ryan to support this program. University of Illinois Extension Administration supported the program in addition to funds provided through the State 4-H Office. Some participant registration fees were provided from local 4-H/Extension funds.

Collaborators

In facilitating this effort, Illinois 4-H worked closely with staffs from the Governor's Office, Executive Mansion, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Treasurer, Comptroller, and several key legislators. Personnel from the legislative offices of the Department of Agriculture, University of Illinois, Illinois Farm Bureau, and key legislative consultants provided advice and counsel. Members of the Illinois Association of Farm Broadcasters embraced the program and gave visibility to the 4-H youth participants. The Springfield Visitors Bureau assisted with the coordination of the educational tours. Outstanding high school government educators joined with legislative consultants to coordinate and teach the educational workshops. University of Illinois Extension Unit staff statewide helped facilitate the event.

Contact Person

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Other Base Program Areas This Program Applies To 4-H/Youth Development

Citizenship Massachusetts Focus *Massachusetts*

Situation

A 1999 survey by the Massachusetts legislators showed a record disconnect between the state legislative process and the present high school student population. This was evidenced by students labeling state legislators and their work irrelevant, distant, inaccessible and of little consequence to the activity of teens. That same year, Massachusetts senators held

a meeting to discuss how this gap could be closed so that the state legislature was seen as a user-friendly, current and valuable resource to teens.

Program Description

Citizenship Massachusetts Focus (CMF) is an interactive, two-day program involving high school students with their advisors, 4-H Youth and Family staff, legislators and their respective staff, and state-level lobbyists. It's for high school students who are interested in learning about the democratic process at the state legislative level. The programs purpose is to prepare youth for leadership in the American democratic process by providing guidance, training and experience in the theory and practice of determining public policy.

CMF is promoted across the Commonwealth with an underlying intent to involve a mix of urban, suburban and rural school districts. Students who have attended have been enrolled in classes such as civics and current events and/or involved as a student leader (i.e., Student Council, National Honor Society). The issues students have brought to the legislators include new driving laws, student's rights, dress codes, new academic standards (i.e., MCAS testing and course requirements), environmental issues, curfew regulations and, in general, how to have a more effective voice in their communities given that they are (often) not of voting age.

Stakeholder Satisfaction

A .25 FTE was designated for the planning, management and evaluation of CMF. In 1999, this amounted to approximately 10 days, 4 of which were at CMF, with the remainder in planning meetings, contacting workshop leaders, consulting with the legislators and schools and follow-up.

The students were involved in the program over the course of two days, with Day one being an intensive series of workshops and Day two spent at the State House with senators and representatives and their staff and a state-level lobbyist. These two days were preceded by a two-hour discussion facilitated by the 4-H Youth and Family Teen Specialist to prepare students for their meetings with state officials, including protocol issues in dealing with legislators, generating a list of teen issues, and re-visiting the basics of state governance.

The first two CMK's involved 48 students, 22 from Hopkins Academy in Western Massachusetts and 26 from Ashland High School in Central Massachusetts. A total of 6 teaching staff participated, serving as chaperones. The majority of youth were from suburban areas.

Accomplishments and Impacts

Pre- and post-evaluations showed marked changes in the perception and knowledge of the state legislative process and it's relevance to teens. The following statements, used in a written survey one week before CMF and, again, at the conclusion of the program showed the following average results:

	Pre	Post
1. I understand how to lobby my legislators	Strongly Disagree	Agree
2. State government does not affect my life	Agree	Disagree
3. I can make a difference in my school and community, utilizing the state legislature	Neutral	Agree
4. I feel at ease in contacting my state legislators	Disagree	Strongly Agree
5. I am aware of the importance of being politically aware and active	Neutral	Agree
6. The workings of government is a mystery to me	Agree	Disagree

There was a 34 percent increase in self-perception of understanding the lobbying method between the pre- and post-evaluation. Twenty-three percent more of the students believed that state government does affect their lives. Utilizing the state legislators to make a difference in their communities was cited by 30 percent more of the students after CMF. Fifty-two percent feel more at ease in contacting their senator and representative. The workings of the government is less a mystery for 37 percent of the participants.

Written comments included expressed appreciation for taking the mystery out of state government and for "letting me see that our officials are just like you and me."

Resource Commitment

The Massachusetts 4-H Foundation, Inc. supported 50 percent of the program cost.

Collaborators

The Family Community Leadership staff and volunteers
 State-level lobbyists
 State legislators and their staff
 High school faculty and administrators

Contact Person

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Other Base Program Areas This Program Applies To
Leadership & Volunteer Development

**Providing Educational Opportunities in Unique
Environments – an Urban County 4-H Fair**

New Jersey

Situation

Passaic County is very diverse geographically, economically and culturally. A majority of the population is located in the southern one-third of the county, which is urban with large areas that are economically disadvantaged. The general public has a limited awareness of the existence of 4-H. Elected officials are aware of 4-H but do not always have an accurate perception of what 4-H is. Youth and adults in this urban area have few opportunities to participate in activities that allow them to interact with the natural environment. 4-H members and volunteers welcome the opportunity to share their experiences with other youth and adults.

Program Description

A one-day "Urban County 4-H Fair" was conducted July 31, 1999 in the town of Wayne in Passaic County. The County 4-H Leaders Association and 4-H Agent collaboratively planned and conducted the Fair. The town and county supported the Fair by allowing 4-H to utilize the Civic Center facilities and equipment at no cost. Events/Activities/Displays included: 4-H Projects – Illustrated that 4-H is more than farm animals. 4-H Club Displays – Highlighted club activities for the past year. Rutgers Cooperative Extension Displays - Master Gardener's, FCS, EFNEP & FSNEP Parent And Child Teaching (P.A.C.T.) Tent that was the location of programs taught throughout the day by Extension faculty and staff, and 4-H volunteers/parents, including:

- P.A.C.T. interactive activities emphasizing language arts, science and math,
- I SPY (science activity), and
- Germ Buster (food safety activity).

Stakeholder Satisfaction

4-H volunteers indicated this is the first time in at least 15 years that so many elected officials (congressman, freeholders [county commissioners] and mayor from the neighboring town) visited the 4-H Fair. Comments and questions from the public

and elected officials about 4-H were very positive – "We never realized 4-H did so many things."

Accomplishments and Impacts

Throughout the day, the general public and elected officials visited and participated in the various educational exhibits and activities. 4-H'ers and 4-H volunteers actively engaged the general public and elected officials to ask them if they were aware of 4-H, had questions about 4-H, wanted information about 4-H, etc.

Collaborators

Passaic County Board of Chosen Freeholders (approval to use facility), Wayne Township Mayor and Director of Parks and Recreation (use of facility & some equipment), County Sheriff Dept., Passaic County Board of Agriculture, RCE Faculty and Staff, local businesses

Contact Person(s)

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Other Base Program Areas This Program Applies To

Family Development & Resource Management
Nutrition, Diet and Health
